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SERMON BY THE REV. JOHN R. GOODMAN.

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IMPORTANCE OF CLERICAL LEARNING:

A Sermon,

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Acts vii. 22.—"*And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.*"

Of the exact elevation to which the arts of utility and elegance had reached in the country of the Pharaohs, and in what the learning of their subjects consisted, the investigation is but partially aided by the indistinct and obscure lights which now remain. The whole current of antiquity, however, directs us to their land, as early enjoying the exalted distinction of the seat of primeval literature, and the cradle of infant science. Celebrated for its genius and grandeur, not only contemporary, but succeeding nations, largely drew from it the riches of wisdom; deriving many of their systems of philosophy and principles of civil government from a country in which the greatest measure of intellectual splendor was discerned, and where the energies of the human mind were most successfully excited.

In the ordination of Divine Providence, the prophet Moses had been favored with the advantages which their schools so amply supplied. Having intimately known their political and religious institutions, and been disciplined for the most striking scenes of public or social life, he was called to be the medium

of a dispensation, destined to exercise an unbounded influence on the civil and sacred history of remote ages. Thus selected by ALMIGHTY GOD, for the deliverance and instruction of the oppressed Israelites, partly on account of his intellectual capacity, and enlightened by a much higher and more excellent inspiration than any subsequent prophet, he was enabled to effect the liberation of his captive countrymen. In the execution of his holy appointment, he communicated, by immediate authority from heaven, a code of revealed laws ;—modelling their government to a form adapted to their particular circumstances, and calculated to answer the high purposes which it was intended to fulfil. The wisdom of the first dispensation was unfolded, and the sources of sacred instruction to mankind were opened in the written oracles, which were illuminated with the splendors of divine truth, and stamped with the impress of the divine mind. Having completed his exalted mission, and led the children of the patriarchs to the borders of a promised Canaan, he resigned a life devoted to the service of the living GOD, and blessed with his signal protection ;—succeeded by no equal prophet, until the glorious advent of that Messiah of whom he was a remarkable type.

In the selection of this eminent lawgiver by the ALMIGHTY for the furthering of his gracious purposes, the mental endowments and acquisitions possessed by him, may be considered as measurably recommending him, from their high character and superior order, for the most important work that could be intrusted to human agency. His many moral excellencies and virtues,—his devout and fervent piety,—the entire devotedness of his heart to the will of his Maker,—his untiring perseverance and unconquerable fortitude, were qualities requisite and essential in one about to be invested with a sacred office of such fearful responsibility. Indeed, had these been wanting, no capacities of mind, nor treasures gained by intellectual culture, however great or intrinsically valuable, would have been sufficient for a work consecrated by the very spirituality of its nature and religious design. Yet his learning, acquired in the land of Egypt, though permitted to be made secondary

in the rank of his other and many qualifications, was nevertheless calculated, by its appropriate and useful employment, to aid him in the execution of his solemn trust, to fulfil which he had been solemnly ordained with a prophet's commission. That it increased his usefulness, and better prepared him for his momentous duty, is evident from the words which supply our theme. They distinctly, and in the way of commendation, make mention of his acquired knowledge and wisdom; and impliedly teach, that in addition to his moral qualities, those which were purely intellectual, should not be without their value, when estimating his exalted character as the faithful servant of GOD, and the wise legislator of his chosen people.

The importance of learning in a commissioned messenger of the Most High, being thus presented for our consideration, the remark in the text is too expressive, and of too much weight, to forbid an application of it to the ordained ministers of the Church of CHRIST. While the eminent gifts and attainments of Moses are made to claim our notice, the inspired pages of a more glorious dispensation than that which he communicated, remind us, that he who was the laborious and efficient Apostle of the Gentiles—the faithful and devoted Paul, "from a child had learned the Scriptures," and from his youth, had sat "at the feet of Gamaliel," there to listen to the lessons of matured wisdom, and receive the principles of sacred knowledge. Disclaiming the too unqualified opinion, which is so inconsiderately expressed, that the other sacred writers of the New Testament were wholly illiterate, a critical reference to their books is confidently challenged, in order that the conviction may be had, that their minds were far from being learned, either as to native intellect or acquired knowledge. In the estimation of the world they were uneducated, because of the vain philosophy of that world they indeed were ignorant. In their day, as in ours, they have always been subject to a decision in matters to which their judges themselves had never directed their serious inquiry: for, while the unprofitable science of the academy or the grove was alone studied in their time, or while proud infidelity and

fanatical folly, from different influences and motives, would alike degrade the intellectual character of the primitive teachers in this generation, an equitable decision cannot be looked for. Yet, if a capacity for delivering the most momentous truths,—if a full and intimate acquaintance with the minutest portions of a previous revelation,—if internal evidences of integrity of mind and heart, and if a competent knowledge of the canons of interpretation, be evidences of learning, the imputation of the evangelists and apostles being altogether unlettered, can in no view, and under no circumstances, be sustained.

The claims that are now made in behalf of the New Testament writers, are not affected, in the most remote degree, by the objection, that they were divinely inspired; and that, consequently, the learning which they exhibit was a special gift and endowment, directly and not mediately received, and only conferred for a particular substantive purpose. The whole of the assertion is granted, not for the sake of the argument, but because the very concession is made which is required. If the sacred writers were gifted with miraculous knowledge, to the end that they might become the recorders of eternal truth, was not the importance of learning, in discharging their holy work, evident in its very bestowal? It matters not, when their intellectual qualifications were made sufficient, or how long, or how brief, was the preparation, or even that a divine energy alone expelled the darkness of previous ignorance from their minds;—they were fitted for the distinguished honor to which they had been called by the Spirit of Truth. The means were enjoyed by them, and they were necessary, else had they not been dispensed. They belonged to those second causes by which the Almighty condescends to effect his gracious plans; and they were of sufficient importance to call for the exercise of a miraculous power, that they might be possessed.

Are, then, these means of little importance in an age of the Gospel Church, when miracles are no longer the visible evidences of the divine power of her great Head and Bishop?

The vast and momentous interests of the LORD's kingdom are committed now to an order of men, whose special duty it is made to preserve and advance them. In the beginning, this duty was rendered clear, and its discharge assisted by gifts from above. These are no longer enjoyed; for they ceased when the immediate occasion for which they were conferred had passed away. What, then, is the obligation resting upon the successors of the primitive priesthood? What, but to aim by assiduous labor and earnest inquiry after truth,—by close investigation and deep research,—by mental improvement and intellectual culture, strengthened and assisted by habitual prayer to the Father of light and Fountain of all wisdom, to reach the models that are before us. We are faithless to our important trust, in which the very concerns of eternity are involved,—faithless to the covenant ourselves have made before the very altars of our great High Priest; we are unmindful of the well-being of the souls committed to our keeping, if we do not strive to supply *them* with that refreshment which they need, and to clothe *ourselves* with that armor which will effectually resist the bold attacks of the infidel, and render harmless the profane raillery of the witling, the rude assaults of the zealot, or the fierce approach of the fanatical persecutor.

We are aware, that the insisting upon of clerical learning, and the attempt to exhibit its tendency to increased usefulness in its possessor, are regarded by too many, if not in an unfavorable light, yet with partial or equivocal approbation. An appeal, however, to the history of the Church, will supply ample evidences of its utility: and one striking instance of its importance, and the value attached to it by the primitive Christians, is sufficient to be brought forward in confirmation of our views. Julian, when apostatizing from the holy faith of that Constantine who was the first to throw aside the imperial purple, and kneel before the humble altar of the Christian's GOD, and seeking the pitiful revenge of which a recreant to his Saviour's Gospel and the immortal good of his own soul alone could have cherished the design, by one act more effectually subserved the iniquitous purposes of his dark bosom, than by

any other, how deeply soever stained with blood. Among other edicts which he proclaimed, and in vindictive cruelty enforced, was that which closed the doors of Christian schools. And it was a measure which was fraught with more injury to the cause of the Saviour's kingdom,—one which more vitally affected its sacred interests,—which brought more moral damage to the primitive Church than the fires of the stake, or the murderous axe of the scaffold, where martyred confessors sealed their faith by triumphant deaths. It was a blow which nothing but malicious ingenuity could have devised; and which a depraved heart, refined in every degree of malignant persecution, could have conceived. Even a heathen historian, and an acknowledged admirer of the apostate emperor, pronounced it a proceeding, alike inconsistent with justice and humanity. But it was a measure, which he too surely foresaw would be a more successful engine to break down the strength and influence of the early professors, and to demolish their cause, than any of the previous methods which former persecutors had pursued. It is a testimony to the value of human learning, supplied by an enemy! Let it be weighed, as it deserves to be, by the votaries of our holy religion.

Pursuing the channel of ecclesiastical records, we find that in the ages which have been correctly termed those of intellectual darkness and gloom, opinions were promulged, and doctrines established, which afterward became the fruitful causes of schism and confusion in the Church. They were the times, when corruptions in our divine faith were boldly taught or acceded to by an ignorant clergy, when error had an undisturbed dominion, and when the genius of our pure and simple religion was decked with the tinselled trappings of Babylon, or the gaudy accessories of Pagan shrines. They were the times, when the oracles of Divine wisdom were denied to a besotted laity, and when their holy and sublime truths were unknown to the very ministers of the altar. "Thick darkness" had filled the sanctuary of the LORD, and "gross darkness the people;" while a laxity of morals, and a still greater deficiency in vital piety, gave melancholy proofs

of the degradation of the human mind, and the neglect of cultivating its exalted faculties.

And what, among the mediate or secondary causes which aided in effecting the glorious work, was it that gave the impulse to that reformation in religion and morals, in which Protestant Christendom now rejoices? It was the accession of the exiled scholars of the east, and the spreading, throughout western Europe, of their literature, that enabled the noble, daring spirits of the sixteenth century, to combat error and expose corruption. It is an era to which learning and science look with grateful joy, and which the Church of the Redeemer hails as the period when she was first disenthralled from oppressive burdens; alike alien to her genius, as destructive to her holiness. The mind was then raised from its lethargy, and the spirit of our divine faith from her slumbers. Clerical learning was then confronted with clerical ignorance; and before the approach of the former, the hoary superstitions of former ages shrunk back to regions that were enwrapped in darkness, or the shadows of a moral death. Religion, stripped of that which was foreign to her, appeared as she was originally announced by her glorious Founder, with her primitive glory refreshed, and her intrinsic gold brightened. The absurdities and follies which had long been accumulating, and which were made no unimportant part of her system, were cast away from minds no longer enveloped in the gloom of barbarous ignorance. Religion came forth from the call of the cloistered scholar, refulgent with pristine beauty. The Gospel of the Redeemer was purified from the vain additions of ignorant, and not more ignorant than of presumptuous folly; and Christianity, in all the circumstances of her appearance, and in all her claims for submission to her heavenly authority, as well as in all her demands for piety and holiness, which had long been neglected, was hailed by perishing, famished souls, as erst, on her first annunciation, she was welcomed by the expecting and devout hearts in Israel.

To sacred learning, thus united with those sanctified dispositions of the heart which alone can render it valuable, eccle-

siastical history points as the important ally of our holy faith. In every age, since the establishment of the kingdom of God upon earth, its advantages have been experienced; now wrestling with the vain-glorious philosophy of the unsubdued heart, and now prostrating the wretched schemes of enthusiastic error. The minister of Christ prepared not only to give "a reason for the hope that is in him," but qualified by a cultivated mind to defend successfully the religion, whose ordained messenger he is, has repeatedly put to silence the scoffings of the infidel, or the loud boastings of atheistical sophists. When the natural sciences have been brought in aid of other weapons by the unbeliever, to weaken the inspired word, the friends of Christianity, in the power of their learning, have signally triumphed over the blasphemy of the sciolist. And while the holiness of her disciples, their lives and conversation, have had their mighty influence and converting effects, the Church of the Redeemer has always been benefitted by the exertions of her accomplished scholars. They have always stood forth in the might and majesty of their intellectual strength, when her principles were endangered, or her doctrines controverted. The best known and most reverenced, have also been the most learned; and throughout the civilized world, wherever illustrious names are pronounced, or the award of literary renown has been conferred, there Christianity claims them for her own,—the well-appointed champions of divine truth, the able defenders of her holy cause! It is not required that the catalogue of Christian writers be rehearsed; indeed, that were not possible. But in every walk of literature, and in every branch of science, the brightest ornaments, the most splendid models, were they, who were not "ashamed of the Gospel of Christ;" but the energies of whose minds were awakened by that Holy Spirit, who is the "wisdom of God, and the power of God."

Nor is it incompatible with the cultivation of Gospel graces, and of the most deep and fervent piety, that the mind be directed to the acquisition of useful knowledge. If the latter be an object with the Christian, or more particularly the Chris-

tian clergyman, can its pursuit be at variance with a striving after the "one thing needful,"—after the sanctification of the heart, and the implantation there of hallowed affections, and desires for GOD and his revealed will? Will man, when enlightened by an improvement of his understanding,—when the wonders and mysteries of matter or mind are more unfolded, love his LORD and CREATOR the less, or serve him with more unwillingness? Is ignorance the mother of piety; and that devotion the most acceptable, which proceeds from bosoms filled with darkness and blind superstition? The "wisdom of the serpent, coupled with the harmlessness of the dove," is presented to our emulation by the Author of our divine religion; and shall his authority in this matter be of no weight? It is true, that there is a learning which has not been without injury to the cause of our holy faith, in whose name, however, it has been employed; a learning which has been accompanied with that pride which is alien to the Gospel, and which has attempted to bring the whole scheme of human redemption, and all its sacred truths and mysteries to the test of human reason. But the principle, like the spirit from which it flows, is from that vain disposition which "puffeth up," instead of that modesty which marks the sincere inquirer after truth. It is but slightly joined with, if it be not wholly separated from, the holy reverence for the word of GOD and his known will, that would prompt the exclamation, "Speak, LORD, for thy servant heareth." The divine oracles, with these, are approached without regard to the distinctive, sacred character; and where the subjects of our faith are of difficulty, they are rejected; leaving the Gospel of the Saviour a cold, cheerless scheme of morals, and taking from the diadem of his meritorious glory the richest jewel which it contains.

But it is a natural consequence, and one that can with certainty be foretold, which results from a neglect of that spirit of piety which must be the prevailing, living sentiment of the Christian heart, without an habitual referring of every thought to the guidance of a heavenly influence, without going to the investigation of Scripture doctrines with a prayerful and

humble mind, an increase of knowledge may injure, instead of benefitting the holy cause, which otherwise it may promote. Much as is claimed for clerical learning, and however great its importance, yet without the religion of the soul,—without the life of GOD experienced there,—without an abiding love for the Saviour, prompting the desire to become more and more worthy in a ministerial station, knowledge will be vain and useless. The man who dares to seek the office of an ordained servant of the ALMIGHTY, without the spiritual qualifications,—without a full measure of practical piety,—without a renewed heart,—without the holy desire prompting him to glorify his GOD and Saviour, touches the ark of the LORD with unclean hands, and at the peril of his poor soul. Yet, while his godly conversation in one particular, is all requisite to the exercising of his ministry to the honor of his great Head; there is an additional claim, that he be "apt and meet for his learning, in edifying the Church;"—that "he be furnished with all needful knowledge," to the end that "he may rightly divide the word of truth." He is to look to the souls within his cure;—to dispense to them, when wearied and oppressed with the convictions of sin, the gracious promises of a crucified LORD;—to bid them hope, when they would despair;—to close up their wounds with the balm of the everlasting word, and to cheer them with the communications of future glory, amid present sorrow and affliction. Holy sacraments and ordained mysteries are committed to his administration, as means of grace, and the confirming of a saving faith. An interest in eternity, and the things of eternity, is to be awakened, and, through the aid of a divine Spirit, holiness of life, and the increase of the lovely graces of the blessed Gospel, are to be promoted in the heart. He is not only to direct immortal beings to the Church in her triumphant glory, but also labor, through gracious assistance from above, to qualify them here for the blessed company that surrounds the throne of the Lamb.

But beside these fearful responsibilities, the minister of CHRIST is called to the discharge of others, of which that altar has witnessed the assumption. He is to "be ever ready with

all faithful diligence to banish and drive away from the Church all erroneous and strange doctrines, contrary to God's word;" —"to be constant in reading the holy Scriptures, and in applying himself to such studies as help to the knowledge of the same." With engagements like these, such vows uttered before omniscience, with the expectations, nay, the claims that our beloved communion has upon us, can we be remiss in providing the necessary stores of sacred learning? If the expulsion of heresy, if a fearless contending for "the faith once delivered to the saints," and for which saints have cheerfully died, are made to be our duty, how can that duty be more effectually discharged, than by arming ourselves with those weapons, through which, and heavenly power, the glory of the Church may be preserved. The advocates of evangelical truth and primitive order ought to strive to become more learned than the promoters of human schemes and modern irregularities. The successors of the apostles, and the ministry in the Church, which they transmitted in purity to our keeping, should qualify themselves for exposing, by sound arguments derived from the source of all truth, the hurtful theories which fanaticism have so fearlessly proclaimed. In our day, the strongest appeals are addressed to us, that, amid the convulsive movements in Christendom, we be not indifferent to the "signs of the times;" that, while the bold attacks of infidelity,—the energetic and extensive operations of a corrupt Church,—the hidden, but yet progressive extension of Socinian heresy,—the wild and uncontrolled frenzy of fanatical proselytism, we be not unmindful of our sacred trust,—to preserve our altars from impurity,—to afford an asylum to the soul of man, and a secure refuge, where she may rest upon the holy Scriptures for her faith, and contemplate in spirit, holy apostles and martyrs as its confessors.

Brethren in the ministry, these remarks have been made in all humility, and not from a self-flattering belief, that he who has presented them, is qualified to offer any thing more instructive than has already been examined by your own minds. His object has only been to remind you, and above all, his own

heart and conscience, that we are stewards of divine mysteries, —preachers to an unbelieving and vain-glorious world,— expounders of the book of eternal life; he would remind you that our Divine Master has committed to our keeping and due employment a most sacred trust, a most precious talent, and that hereafter, a strict inquisition will be had, as to its profitable exercise. He would refer you to the long array, the mighty host, so calm and beautiful, of the fathers of the Church to which it is our privilege to belong, who from age to age have stood forth her boldest champions, raising their voices in defence of our holy religion: he would point out to you the virtuous, and pious, and learned of our communion, who have merited so well of it, and all Christendom;—men who headed the Reformation, and went glorying to the stake,—who translated the Bible, and at the imminent, deadly peril of their lives, procured that it be set up in churches;—men whose works will endure so long as the language in which they are written will last, and which will be read so long as veneration for the good, and admiration of sacred literature, are among the sensibilities of the human heart. "If there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think" upon those who once ministered at our altars; and, while enjoying the shade and shelter of their noble strength,—when looking up to the majestic fabric which singly they have aided in erecting, be it our delight to emulate their splendid example: though to fall short of their deservings would be no shame, as to reach the lowest point of their excellence would be our glory!

And we might refer you to those of this branch of the Lord's Zion, whose names and lives are a savour of sanctity and learning;—to that holy man of God,* that venerable patriarch in the existing line of the Apostles' successors, whom heaven, in mercy, has spared unto this generation,—the living commentary upon Gospel virtue, and the cheering evidence of its hallowing influence upon the heart. We would point to him in his "good old age," so serene and calm, so honored and

* Bishop White.

reverenced, prepared and waiting for the summons of that Master, whom he has so well and so long served in his kingdom on earth, and would say that he, to whom all delight to render the tribute of their esteem, is not more eminent for his piety than illustrious for his sacred learning. And we would call to your remembrance another,* but who has been gathered to his reward!—whose name and whose praise can be found "in all the churches,"—whose active and devoted labors in the Redeemer's cause have been rehearsed in far-off lands, and which have earned for him the meed of honor for primitive zeal, and an apostle's spirit. Is it necessary to mention the name of Hobart, who bent his mitred head to the lisping child of the Sunday School, and supplied it with the primary lessons of our divine religion; or who, looking to the numerous wants of the communion, furnished its clergy with the valuable productions of his vigorous and well-cultivated mind. Or is it called for, that we remind you of him whom we all knew, and knowing, loved, and loved, too, so much,—that fearless champion, who so earnestly contended for the "apostles' doctrine" and primitive order in your Diocese, when irregularity prevailed, and error was triumphant,—who toiled, and that successfully, the Lord strengthening him, in the field of labor, to which he was ordained;—who, living, planted himself before the altar of his God, and when dying, grasped its horns, still harnessed for the warfare, breathing forth with his departing spirit the victorious confession of his faith, and the fervent prayer for acceptance with the great Captain of his salvation.

These are names that will be for ever hallowed in the memory of the Church,—names of sainted men, dear to her people for all that gives grace to the heart, and elevation to the mind. Let it be our endeavor to trace their path to eminence; let our piety be as ardent as theirs,—our zeal as devoted,—our concern for souls as great. Our duty is before us, as the register of our vows is in heaven; and divine assistance is promised in aid of their fulfilment. With an abiding sense of

* Bishop Ravenscroft.

our momentous responsibility, let us continue in spiritual improvement of ourselves, and in dispensing immortal food to others. And when our stewardship shall have ended, and our account been called for, may an admission into the temple above, into the Church triumphant, be our reward, through the merits of the Great Shepherd and Bishop of souls!

THE WRATH OF MAN PRAISES GOD:

A Sermon,

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Psalm lxxvi. 10.—"*Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.*"

THIS psalm was probably written shortly after the destruction of the army of Sennacherib, and in special reference to that wonderful event by which GOD delivered his people from the hands of their enemies. In order to punish the Jews for their iniquities, and to humble and reform them, that they might be more faithful in serving and honoring him, the ALMIGHTY employed the impious king of Assyria as his instrument. Sennacherib was permitted to inflict his wrath upon that people, and to chastise them, by taking all the fenced cities of Judah. Thus far his rage was suffered to vent itself, because it was working the Divine will, and its beneficial consequences to the Jewish people would redound to the glory of GOD. But when Sennacherib would have proceeded against them further than was necessary to accomplish the ends of justice and mercy,—when he would have carried his rage to an extremity, by sacking and destroying the holy city, GOD restrained his wrath, by cutting off in one night his numerous host, and thus preventing the execution of his barbarous purpose.

Thus doth the great Head of the Church and Governor of the Universe always control the enmity and rage of the ungodly.

The wrath of man indeed worketh not the righteousness of GOD; still, wicked and cruel as that wrath is, the ALMIGHTY so modifies and directs the exercise of it, that it contributes to the attainment of some great ultimate object, by which his Church is benefitted, his people improved, and his name glorified. The moment it has reached this point, beyond which its indulgence would be injurious in the moral government of the world, a restraint or check is put upon it by the hand of heaven. GOD saith to the rage of man, as he doth to the sea, "Thus far shalt thou go, but no farther." So that while the wicked are fighting against Him, and aiming at the accomplishment of their own evil designs,—while they are blaspheming his name, opposing and reviling his truth, afflicting and persecuting his people, attempting to overthrow his Church, and filling the earth with violence, he makes them instruments for the production of eventual good. They are unwittingly agents in fulfilling his will, and executing some part of his great plans of benevolence. Thus, "surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain."

I. IT PRAISES GOD'S JUSTICE. He makes it a means of inflicting merited punishment upon transgressors. All history abounds with examples. The wrath of the Canaanites, the Moabites, the Mesopotamians, the Assyrians and others, was the instrument wherewith GOD at various times severely punished the children of Israel, because they had done evil in his sight. The rage of the hypocritical and violent Jehu was the means of executing GOD'S just judgments upon the wicked house of Ahab. The wrath of the Romans praised the Divine justice in the destruction of the rebellious and obstinate Jews, who had rejected the Gospel, and contemptuously crucified the LORD of life. Sometimes the wrath of wicked men praises GOD, in consequence of its being so ordered, that it turns to their own defeat and confusion. The evil which they intended for others falls upon themselves. They are made the authors and agents of their own punishment; thus exemplifying the truth of the Psalmist's remark, that "the wicked have drawn

out the sword, and have bent their bow to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation. Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken." Thus the wrath of Egypt's king and people against the Hebrews recoiled upon their own heads in the plagues and in the Red Sea. The Persians, in the time of Esther, thought to exterminate Israel. Their plans ended in the slaughter of their own people. And the proud Haman, by his wrath against one man, undermined his own influence, and erected his own gallows. The accusers of Daniel, too, prepared the way for their own destruction in the lion's den. Thus many a tyrant, and many a wicked man, have taken measures to enslave, oppress, or injure the innocent, and found that those measures were as speedy and effectual as could have been devised for working their own downfal and ruin. In the snare which they laid for others were their own feet taken. The weapon which they aimed at a neighbor's heart, smote through their own. Bad men frequently find that an evil action, in the remorse of conscience which it produces, and in all its disgraceful and painful consequences upon mind, body, and estate, is a punishment as severe as it is just. Thus is the wrath of man made to praise the *justice* of God.

II. It praises His Wisdom. His wisdom becomes more manifest and wonderful to us, when exhibited in accomplishing his holy will by such unlikely means,—in thwarting the crafty designs of sinners,—in exposing their deep-laid schemes,—in so controlling their secret counsels, and directing their dark steps, that when they are anticipating success and triumph, they unexpectedly find themselves trembling on the brink of a precipice, or plunged into the pit which they had digged for others. The Divine wisdom is conspicuous in bringing them into their own snares, and enabling those whom they were about to destroy, to escape as a bird from the fowler. Thus was the wise counsel of Ahithophel rejected by Absalom. This rejection, in its result, saved king David, restored him to his throne, and precipitated the traitorous Absalom to defeat

and death. We see the Divine wisdom in baffling the wrath of Herod, in the case of the wise men from the East, and saving the infant JESUS from the slaughter,—in so often extricating the Saviour and his disciples from the artifice and power of their malignant adversaries; and above all, in making the wrath of the Jews the means of spreading abroad, and firmly establishing that very religion which they labored to suppress.

III. THE WRATH OF MAN PRAISES THE GOODNESS OF GOD. He makes it a source of great benefits to his Church and people. The wrath of Joseph's brethren raised him to the government of a nation, and led to the saving of much people from famine and death. The wrath of Balak, instead of curses, brought blessings upon Israel. The wrath of Haman elevated Mordecai to the side of the throne, and promoted the peace and prosperity of the previously oppressed Jews. The wrath of the devil brought a Redeemer into the world to bruise his head, and to exalt penitent sinners to a better inheritance than man enjoyed before the fall. And the wrath of those infatuated men whom our Saviour styled the children of their father the devil, enabled Him to complete the great atoning sacrifice, by which heaven is opened to all believers. And does not the wrath of man praise the goodness of GOD in the whole history of his Church? in the whole history of all his faithful servants? He uses it as a means of correcting and reforming them, and of bringing them to a higher place in his favor. Look at the frequent afflictions which rested so heavily upon the LORD'S ancient people from the hands of their enemies. Their land was invaded and laid waste, their towns plundered, and the inhabitants carried away as slaves. These were a series of necessary and wholesome chastisements, intended by the ALMIGHTY to bring them to repentance, and to purify them from the crimes of idolatry to which they had become exceedingly prone. So that while the Assyrians and Babylonians were pouring out their wrath upon the Jews, GOD was converting that wrath into a sure blessing. It was the means of curing them for ever of idolatry, and of restoring them in peace to their own country. Again, at a very early period the

Christian Church began to grow corrupt, and her members to lose the zeal and purity of the apostles' days. The wrath of pagan Rome was therefore let loose to check the increasing evil, and to purify the Church, even as silver is purified in the furnace. And in after ages, when Christians had again become unfaithful, papal Rome was allowed to crush them to the lowest point of endurance, till they were ready to burst from their shackles, and return to the liberty and purity of the Gospel. And then the wrath of the pontiff and his creatures, in digging for them the dungeons of the inquisition, and kindling the fires of martyrdom, served only to inflame their zeal, and call forth their courage and fortitude. The wrath of the pope against those whom he called heretics, praised the goodness of God, in hastening and strengthening the blessed work of the Reformation. A corrupt Church is seldom reformed till after a season of depression and trial from its enemies. These enemies, then, with all their rage, are only God's ministers for good. To what are we to attribute the augmented strength and triumphs of the Christian religion at the present day? Under God, to the malignity and wrath of such foes as Voltaire, Gibbon, Hume, and Paine. Their attacks have caused the truth to be more thoroughly investigated, and have resulted in pouring a flood of light upon the evidences of our faith, and thereby enabling men to see altogether more clearly than they would otherwise have seen, how firm is the foundation, how impregnable are the bulwarks of Christianity. Whatever partial and temporary evil those infidels may seem to have effected, it is certain that few men have given occasion to greater general and lasting benefit to the Christian cause.

It is evident that beneficial effects, similar to those which result to the Church at large, are produced upon individual Christians, by the operation of the same causes. Trials, from whatever source they spring, are calculated to purify and elevate our characters, enliven our Christian graces, and fit us for the enjoyment of a higher degree of happiness. And this is effected by the persecution and wrath of foes, as well as by sickness or any other calamity. Job, amid unjust suspicions

and reproaches,—Daniel and his three friends, in the power of their enemies,—David, when near falling into the hands of those who sought his life,—and Christians, when harassed and oppressed, exhibit more of the virtue, and efficacy, and beauty of their holy faith, than in the days of prosperity. The light of religion shines brightest in the night of affliction. Then the world is least esteemed, and GOD is most trusted and most glorified. Myriads may be able to look back, with wonder and gratitude, to the displeasure and hostility of men,—to their acts of injustice, treachery and wickedness, as the blessed means of either greatly improving their earthly condition, or of originating or of strengthening that glorious hope which has its full fruition in heaven.

Let us, brethren, from these considerations, learn to see the hand of GOD in all the sufferings and evils which man is permitted to inflict upon his fellow man,—in all the adverse fortune which we may experience as a Church or as individuals. Let us submit with patience to his will, and wait, in the cheerfulness of hope, till his gracious designs shall have been accomplished, and the dark cloud rolled away; being fully assured that we shall, ere long, see how wonderfully and completely GOD maketh the wrath of man to praise him, by converting it into a most important instrument for the promotion of justice, and for the ultimate advancement of our happiness. Let us never fear that unprincipled men can carry on their machinations against us too far. No: they are but the instruments of Him who is ever watchful over our welfare. So far as their wrath can accomplish his benevolent designs toward us, he will permit it to rage, but no farther. "The remainder of wrath shall he restrain." "The madness of the people," as well as "the raging of the sea," is controlled by him, and cannot pass the bounds which he shall set. When wicked men are inclined to overpass those bounds to effect our ruin, he shall lay his hand upon them and save us. He shall destroy their influence, paralyze their power, turn their counsel into foolishness, entrap them in their own snare, or, what is far better, change their hearts, and convert them to the side of truth, and justice, and

piety; so that we can heartily join with the Psalmist in saying, that we will not fear what man can do unto us. Through all the storms and strifes of this warring world, we will rest in the confidence not only of security, but of eventual triumph. For we know that we are in God's holy keeping, and that not a single blow shall be permitted to fall upon us,—that not a single pang shall assail us,—that not a single tear be drawn forth by the wounds of an enemy, which will not materially contribute to our happiness, either during the remainder of our earthly course, or in the world to come, where we shall for ever rejoice from our sorrows at the right hand of the throne of God. The Lord loveth his people, and will save them from their enemies, and from the hand of all that hate them. As directed against them, therefore, surely, O Lord, "the wrath of man shall praise thee; and the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain."